

Disciplining Inanimate Objects

by John Keasler

There are many different ways to handle fury at inanimate objects.

They are all rather fun to watch unless, of course, you are the one who is furious at an inanimate object.

I happened to see a neighbor the other day shaking his lawnmower. He didn't know I was there, but I had been watching as he came blithely along behind his power mower and started to turn the corner around his house.

He misjudged the distance. The mower stopped suddenly when a wheel jammed against the house. He didn't stop, and the handle sunk deep into his abdomen.

"Oof!" he went. You could tell it hurt.

"Doodlemvunnavitch!" he choked at his mower, grabbed the handle tightly with both hands and shook the mower until its teeth rattled. Thereby teaching it a good lesson.

He was still doing it when I skulked away rapidly, as punishing an inanimate object is a private and near-sacred ritual. Plus, you can get killed if anybody catches you watching.

Many people are kickers. Kicking inanimate objects until the foot begs for mercy is one of the most reliable ways to keep inanimate objects in line.

Almost any expressway journey of any extent will reveal a motorist or two soundly kicking his stalled car. (If it were not for the kickers, the highways would be littered with stalled cars as firm discipline is the only way to keep cars in some semblance of obedience. Or so kickers feel.)

Some measures of disciplining inanimate objects are far more effective than others. My wife, I regret to say, has possibly the most ineffective method I have ever seen. She lectures the offending object.

Let her but attempt to pick up a pan with a hot handle. Does she follow any logical, proven disciplinary method? No! "Yow" she screams. "Hot! Hot handle!" She jumps up and down, eyes glittering, shouting at it, "You *hot pan!* Damn *hot pan* you!"

"Margery," I try to reason, "That will do no good. It knows it is a *hot pan*. How do you ever expect a pan to learn?" But she does not learn. Just the other night, trying to put a piece of firewood in the Franklin stove, her left large toe was squashed flat when the piece of wood – which had been playing possum – suddenly galvanized into action, twisting from her grasp it dove down and squashed her toe.

"Stupid wood!" she squalled, leaning very low so the wood could hear her well, "Oh, oh, you stupid wood!"

"You've got to throw the wood," I explained patiently, still again. But she didn't. She never learns. Inanimate objects do not learn through lecturing. They must be thrown against a wall.

I have thrown most objects in my home against the wall at one time or another, and things shape up when I come into that house, believe you me.

At least, I have thrown most objects against the wall that I could lift – including several that bounced back and hit me between the eyes. (These are incorrigible and must be jumped up and

down on.)

There is, I'll grant you, a certain element of risk in being a thrower. When the refrigerator deliberately quit running I couldn't get it off the ground – although I did batter it soundly against the wall – and sometimes a group of conspiratorial and recalcitrant coat-hangers will not come out of the closet to throw but, generally speaking, throwing is a fine way to keep inanimate objects regimented and obedient. (Unless they are plugged in.)

A great many otherwise fine disciplinarians punch inanimate objects. I cannot endorse this. More often than not it will hurt your hand.

One night, one of my sons was trying to feed his dog, and the wall can-opener had started to cut into the dog-food can but wouldn't really go but a little ways.

He was soundly punching the can opener. Despite the fact that he had gotten in several good left jabs and a solid right cross, I stopped him.

"Son, don't do that," I cautioned him, "that wall can-opener has sharp edges. Here, let me show you."

I removed the can from the can-opener and threw the can hard on the floor. "See?" I said.

"Gosh, Dad," he said, vastly impressed, "I never would have thought of that." As the twig is bent, so grows the tree.

One morning my grandfather, in a hurry, had been trying and trying to get a hard-knot out of his shoelace while my grandmother kept saying she would be late for church.

"There," he said, at long last, as the knot came undone. Then the shoelace promptly broke! My grandfather threw the entire shoe through a screen.

"Walter, Walter," my grandmother cried in alarm. "Why did you throw your shoe through the screen?"

With the quiet restraint that was his hallmark he replied, "You know any other way to throw a damn shoelace?"

Let us all maintain that wisdom.